



Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048. Our telephone number is (212) 432-5707. Please send all e-mail inquiries to: nyabg@worldnet.att.net. *Update* provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

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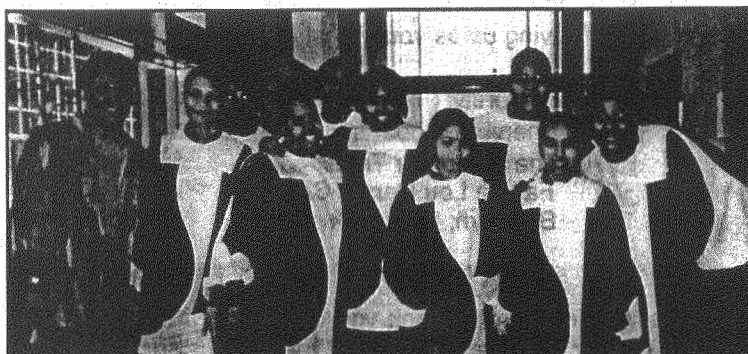
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EXPLORING NEW YORK'S AFRICAN PAST

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.



Lincoln High School Gospel Ensemble from Yonkers, NY,
directed by Cecilia Meyers. Photo credit: Jenniffer Ethymious

*Let us labor to acquire knowledge, to break down the
barriers of prejudice and oppression believing that if
not for us, for another generation, there is a brighter
day in store -- Charlotte Forten Grimke (1837-1914)*

The third annual OPEI Youth Symposium to educate young people, their families, and teachers about the landmark African Burial Ground, the New York African presence, and slavery in the North was held on Saturday, March 27, 1999. It was attended by more than 150 young people and their families. Exploring the **New York African American Past** was the theme of the day long symposium. The day's events began with a spiritual vigil at the landmark African Burial Ground site, and was followed by a musical tribute by the Lincoln High School Gospel Ensemble of Yonkers, New York. The Ensemble is directed by Mrs. Cecilia Meyers. The musical tribute was followed by African Burial Ground site tours conducted by OPEI Public Education staffers: Donna Harden Cole, Deinabo George, and support staffer Tyrene Wright. At the OPEI offices at 6 World Trade Center, youthful participants attended a Spring luncheon and "Youth Only" workshop to assess how young people can participate in sharing New York's African past.

(Continued on page 14)

"The fate of our Ancestors' remains will not be decided without the Descendant Community's involvement and approval... Public funds cannot be used without public accountability."

-- Ayo Harrington, Friends of the African Burial Ground

▶▶▶ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ▶▶▶

OPEI Supporters

On February 20, 1999 we were able to participate in your film festival. The festival was instructional, educational, and inspirational. Our young children left there with the understanding that the African Burial Ground is a historic site which must be preserved for all Americans. They also understand that we need people of color in all of the professions especially in the profession of archaeology. We applaud your works and the stand that you have taken to preserve the history and memory of our people. We sincerely thank you for having us as your guests.

Sincerely,
Sheryl D. Robertson, Exec. Director
The Sojourner Truth/
Fannie Lou Hamer Council
Brooklyn, New York

I'd like to take the time out to thank you on behalf of the Horizon Teen Center and the Choice is Mine group for so generously sharing your time and experiences with us. Your talk on the African Burial Ground was both educational and inspirational.

It is my belief that the teens gained valuable knowledge about significant parts of "Our Story" which others have tried to overlook and ignore. To think that there was so much in terms of the African experience going on right here in the area and so few of our youth know about it. Your slide presentation was quite enlightening. I will be bringing several teens to the Youth Symposium and we look forward to seeing you again...Once again, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to help give direction to our community's youth.

Sincerely,
Melvin F. Gattis II
Choice is Mine Facilitator
Jersey City, NJ

A Letter From China

I had contacted you all some time ago expressing interest in helping with your efforts to inform people about the African Burial Ground Project. I must apologize for my lack of participation, but it hasn't been due to "all mouth and no action." You see, I've been out of the country studying abroad in China since June 1998 and shall return to the U.S. June 1999. When I return, it is my desire to get active in helping you in anyway that I can. If it is possible, can you please send me any current information on the project so

that I may stay abreast of what is going on. I was curious about the result of the testings at Howard University and also as to whether my designs had been submitted/ accepted yet for the burial ground itself.

Anything you can send me would be appreciated. Also if you have any teaching packets, I would like one or two as well. I am teaching Chinese children and it would be nice to show them some of my history rather than have them learn via British learning aids which only tell a partial, negative story. I thank you in advance for any assistance you can provide and pray that you all keep your faith in this Project. Many are unaware of the great work you all are doing, but believe me I am spreading the word.

Curt Fields
Nanjing, China

Stamp Petition Drive Gets Results

Please find enclosed a completed petition for the stamp petition drive to manifest a commemorative stamp. All of the signatees are prisoners here at Haynesville Correctional Center. Although we do not have our freedom, we still desire for our voice to be heard on behalf of our ancestors in regards to the relevant issue of the petition. We send a heart-expressed thanks to y'all for all of the wonderful work that is being done by the OPEI! I know the ancestors on the other side of existence are very proud of y'all efforts as well. May the blessing grace of the creator -4- ever shine upon OPEI members and y'all families. Take care and continue the glorious work.

Your Brother -N- Da Struggle
Barry Coleman
Haynesville, Virginia

A Senator's Support

I ardently support your efforts to see the African Burial Ground commemorated by the issuance of a series of postal stamps. It is a pleasure for me to play a role in trying to bring recognition to this National Historical Landmark project and wish you all the best in this endeavor of implementation.

Sincerely,
Alton R. Waldon, Jr.
State Senator, 10th S.D.

OPEI welcomes letters from our readers but reserves the right to edit for length or clarity.

African Burial Ground Update: Status of the Archaeological Investigation-- Part 2

Jean Howson, Ph.D.

Coffin hardware is the most common artifact found at the African Burial Ground. One of the most important aspects of our current analysis is coffin style. Of the people buried in the excavated portion of the African Burial Ground, 94% were in coffins, a total of 401. With this large number, it will be possible to develop a typology. Variability in coffins should be related to several factors: changes in coffin style and construction techniques over time, differences among colonial New York City's artisans (whether African or European) who built the coffins, differences in cost, and differences in beliefs about what was a proper burial.

We will shortly be inventorying the coffin hardware, and at the same time we will continue using the field records and drawings to determine shapes and sizes, and sometimes construction details. The development of a useful typology is still ahead, but promises to be an important means for both describing the African Burial Ground and interpreting it as the site of meaningful activity in the past.

We are, as always, using what available documents there are as well as archaeology. One question we asked was who provided the coffin when an enslaved African died? We also wanted to know who made coffins for enslaved and free Africans in the New York community. There is some evidence

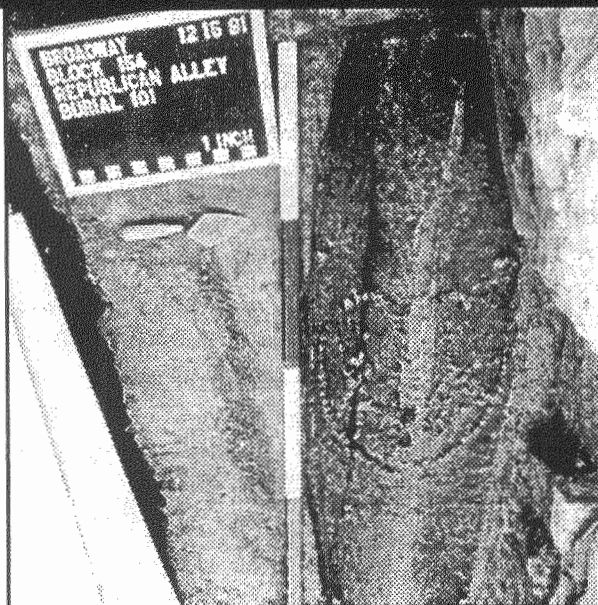


Fig. 1. The heart shaped symbol which appears on the coffin lid of Burial 101 was made of iron tacks. This individual was a man who was 30-35 years old when he died. Two bone button fragments and two shroud pins were recovered with this burial.

Photo: General Services Administration.

that in New York at least some enslavers paid for the coffins of captive Africans.

Records of one 1750s colonial cabinetmaker, Joshua Delaplaine, include orders for coffins for 13 Africans. The orders were placed by others, presumably enslavers, as they read "coffin for his negro woman" or "coffin for his negro child." These records also give us other kinds of information: the coffins cost from 10 to 14 shillings for adults. Extras like screws or rosin made these coffins more expensive.

Childrens' coffins were 4 to 5 shillings. Various kinds of decoration were available, though the 13 cases we know of from Joshua Delaplaine were mainly very simple. In contrast, coffins for Europeans could be very fancy, made with expensive hardwoods, lined and decorated, costing up to £4 or £5. Though we know the range of

prices Africans would have had to pay to have coffins built at this one shop, African artisans may have priced their wares differently.

Burial 101's coffin, has a decoration on its lid which we have interpreted as a Sankofa symbol from the Akan people in West Africa. Its meaning is, in essence, that we need to learn from the past in order to be ready for the future. This symbol may or may not be an indicator of extra expense. It is likely that some Africans would have donated their labor in preparing coffins for family or community members. [For a fuller discussion regarding the Sankofa symbol, see Update Vol. 1, No. 8, "Identification and Validation of the Sankofa Symbol," by Professor Kwaku Ofori-Ansa, an art historian at Howard University].

Still, the materials for the hundreds of coffin fragments we have recovered would have cost money, perhaps collected from mourners or

provided by secret burial societies. The presence of the symbol itself, of course, indicates resistance to the dehumanization and homogenization that this community's enslavers attempted.

The final aspect of the archaeological investigation that I want to briefly discuss is the comparative research being conducted. This Project, for the first time, brought together specialists to pool their research and this has allowed us to broaden our vision of the African Burial Ground as an archaeological site. Members of the research team, including archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and historians, have been collecting information on the death beliefs and practices in relevant parts of Africa and of other Africans in the diaspora. We're also researching precolonial West African villages and the great fort towns on the coast during the centuries captives were taken to the Americas. At Elmina, for example, the graves of Africans who died were recovered by Dr. Chris DeCorse, a member of the archaeological team, who conducted excavations in the area.

Burials have also been found beneath the houses of Africans who were formerly enslaved on plantation sites like Seville and at Maroon enclaves in Jamaica. In Suriname, where Dr. Kofi Agorsah, another Project team member works, there is also a growing body of information on how African peoples have treated their dead and how that relates to systems of belief. Some of this information comes from archaeology but we have also learned a great deal from written documents and ethnography, the study of cultural groups.

Narrow interpretations are discarded as we examine all of the ways beliefs about death can be

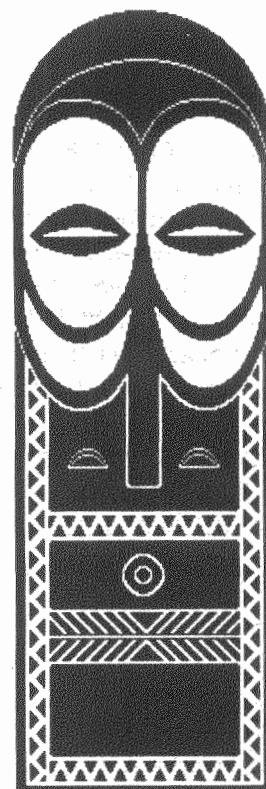
expressed in material practices. I'll touch on two examples of what I would call narrow interpretations. The first is that the overwhelming presence of coffins suggests assimilation to European customs.

Burial in coffins may represent an Akan practice which became widespread in colonial New York's broader African community; or a belief that those buried here were ultimately going to be taken home and therefore were not placed directly in the ground; or active resistance on the part of New York's enslaved Africans, who insisted their enslavers pay for, but not attend or participate in decent funerals.

The second interpretation is that burial in a segregated place, as was the case in New York, reflects domination or coercion by white Europeans. We've learned of cases in Africa where burials outside the town would be the norm. It also occurred at Caribbean plantations where Africans lived in villages where burials beneath the house would have been possible. In New York they lived in the homes of their enslavers and community-formation among Africans from diverse backgrounds required getting together away from their households, in a separate place from Europeans. As a result, this African Burial Ground location may speak more to resistance than to oppression.

The evidence from Africa and the diaspora has caused us to question and re-question all of our interpretations of the mere archaeological data. We are, and I think I speak for the others on the team as well as myself, humbled by the sheer

complexity and richness of African diaspora history. But, painstaking and tedious as it often seems, the archaeological research has given us new insight into that history.



Bembe wooden mask from the lower Congo area © 1971 Geoffrey William

Want to learn more about the African Burial Ground?

1. *Become a Volunteer* -- to date OPEI has nearly two hundred individuals who devote their time or various skills to the Project.
2. *Become a Student Intern* -- OPEI is currently accepting applications for college interns for the Summer of 1999
3. *Attend OPEI's Quarterly Educators Symposia and Film Festivals* (see schedule this issue page 6)

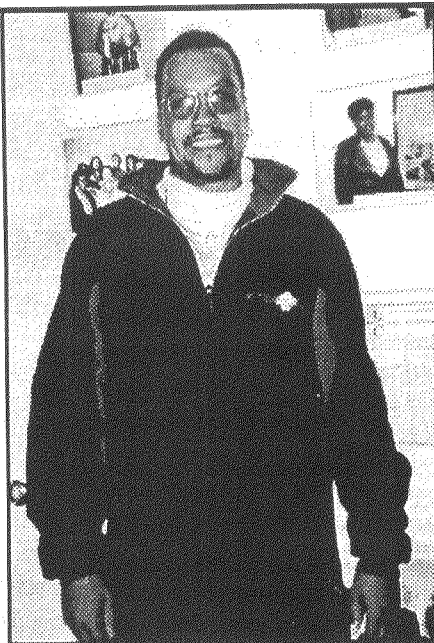
AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT VOLUNTEER

Allison Manfra

Augustus C. Temple, III is an active volunteer at the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI). He recalls learning about the African Burial Ground while it was being excavated in 1991 from a newspaper article that he read. Augustus would pass by the site on his way to work when it was boarded up and under construction. He would bring people to peek through the boards surrounding the site, for a glimpse at the artifacts and remains.

Augustus C. Temple, III, a native New Yorker, grew up in the Bronx. In addition to volunteering at the OPEI, Augustus has both a music and video production company, and is a professional driving instructor. He is a community producer for Brooklyn Cable Access Television (BCAT) and has a television program, "The Chillin' Fields," which airs monthly on BCAT. Augustus uses this television program to update viewers on the status of the African Burial Ground Project.

As a volunteer at OPEI, Augustus has been present at several Saturday events, lending his assistance with various assignments. His involvement with the OPEI began with the campaign for the African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp. Although he does not recall how he learned of the commemorative stamp campaign, his involvement with the OPEI as a volunteer began when he attended



Augustus C. Temple, III
Photo credit: Emilyn L. Brown

a stamp committee meeting. From then on, he has been informing people about the African Burial Ground, about the campaign to commemorate the site with a stamp, and has been avidly collecting signatures for the stamp petition.

Augustus attributes his interest in the Project to his consciousness and protective nature towards the ancestors buried in the African Burial Ground. He is among many volunteers who, as members of the descendant community, intend to see the ancestors and the site properly commemorated and memorialized. Through his volunteer work at the OPEI, Augustus has gained insight into the true history of New York. He recognizes the role that Africans played in building New York, and hopes that others will acknowledge this truth. He intends

to remain a volunteer with the Project until this information is included in the history books because it is so different from the history he learned in private school in the Bronx. Augustus feels it is important for young people to be aware of the contributions that Africans made to building New York, and this country. He is sharing these educational experiences with his eleven-year-old daughter, Radiah, as he recently shared the history of the Henrietta-Marie with her while it was on exhibit in Norfolk, Virginia. Augustus hopes that by exposing Radiah to these historical insights, it will help to shape her personality and outlook on life.

This volunteer's most memorable moment at the OPEI was the laboratory tour he attended. He recalls collecting rocks and shells, in the woods or on the beach as a child. His sense of adventure was restored when he viewed the collection of artifacts from the Burial Ground. Awed by how well preserved the artifacts looked, he was moved at the experience of having pieces of the past so close in front of him. It was more thrilling and educational than anything he had learned in history books.

Augustus is currently working on a documentary film about the status of the African Burial Ground Project. He is a dedicated volunteer who believes in educating people on the true history of New York, and offers invaluable assistance to the OPEI staff in this cause.

◆*◆



African Burial Ground Update

Compiled by Emilyn L. Brown

Winners of the Second Annual Writing Competition

Due to the heavy volume of entries received, we are postponing the announcement of our finalists. Winners will be notified by mail and formally honored at our Open House event to be held on Saturday, May 22, 1999. The winning stories and poems will be published in the summer issue of *Update*.

Burials Unearthed in City Hall Park. The landscape renovation of City Hall Park, which began in January of 1999, has unearthed many physical reminders of New York City's past. It has also raised a number of questions concerning landmark status and what it means. The park's long and varied history includes its use as a pasture by Dutch settlers, and decades later, under British rule, the site of the City's first poorhouse. Some historians link the presence of this poorhouse, which had its own cemetery at or near Chambers Street, to a number of skeletal remains recovered in the area over the last 6 years. But others link the remains to the African Burial Ground and there is strong debate about where the boundaries of the original five to six acre cemetery were situated.

The first recovery was in February of 1993 when Con Edison unearthed human remains during installation of electrical transformers. In October of 1995 work on the interconnecting trenches at Centre and Chambers Streets also unearthed fragments of human remains [see *Update* Vol. 1, Number 10 for news item and community reaction]. In February, 1999, the most recent incident, interred remains were unearthed at the northwest portion of the park (Chambers Street near Broadway).

According to Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Scientific Project Director, Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) officials have contacted him several times over the past five years to analyze the remains. Although he has repeatedly requested reports and approval from the descendant community, LPC has not provided them. As a result, Howard University has not taken any action on this request.

Dr. Blakey holds the position that "the remains need to be stored in a more appropriate facility, possibly in New York City, where they would await reburial. DNA studies might be useful to determine whether or not they are the remains of Africans," he added, "yet even that research will require some formal approval from the descendant community."

The Public Forums for the Design of the Interpretive Center held on April 8th became a sounding board for unresolved grievances towards the General Services Administration. At issue was the handling of the scientific component of the Project, [see *Update* issue No. 8, and this issue page 7] and other critical concerns raised by Friends of the African Burial Ground, [see this issue page 8]. For GSA's update on Interpretive Center finalists see page 13.

Raynard T. Davis 1963-1999

Raynard T. Davis was memorialized at Austin Royster Funeral Home in Washington on April 10th. His parents reported that he had been stabbed to death while meeting with people who said they wanted to buy his car. Ray Davis had been a dedicated member of the Howard University laboratory staff between 1993 and 1997, working first on the Cobb Collection and later became an Osteological Technician Assistant until he was promoted to an Osteological Technician on the African Burial Ground Project. Among his many contributions, Ray was responsible for X-ray images of more than 100 remains, which will form part of our permanent record of the lives of the ancestors. Ray Davis was born in the District of Columbia on August 20, 1963 to Hayward Davis, Jr. and Jean M. Davis. He received his B.A. degree from Oberlin College, Ohio, where he majored in Anthropology and Black Studies. He did further studies toward a Masters Degree in African Studies at Howard University. Ray had previously been a research coordinator for the book *Eyes on the Prize*. He served as Executive Director of SCAR (Student Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism), and was President of the Davis Contracting Company owned by his family. He had traveled extensively in East Africa and Europe, spending a summer working with Richard Leakey as part of a Harvard University summer program in Kenya. Ray leaned toward Islam as his guiding faith, and considered all people as children of the universe. He was our committed and thoughtful brother who will be deeply missed by all of us.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT
THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT?
SEND E-MAIL TO: nyabg@worldnet.att.net

A Response to General Services Letter Update Vol. 2, No. 9

Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D.

The General Services Administration's (GSA) letter of January 15th indicates that they have exceeded a required funding limit. Such a limit (1% of building costs) was in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) prior to the Congressional hearings which stopped GSA from further illegal excavation of the site. This 1% stipulation was over-ridden by GSA's subsequent agreements with the community and other agencies, because the site is more important than average. GSA has already spent beyond 1% because GSA agreed to do far more in order to correct the problems it created by desecrating and destroying our oldest African Burial Ground.

GSA makes it sound as though \$15 million is exceedingly generous. It is not. GSA has understood that the scientific research would cost at least \$10 million from the very beginning. We have only received \$5.2 million with DNA and chemical testing still left to be done. To put things in perspective, the preservation of an historic light house on the coast of North Carolina will cost approximately the same amount. Is the African Burial Ground Project worth more than preventing further damage to an old Southern light house?

GSA has yet to meet with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation or the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission who are also responsible for implementing GSA's legal requirements. In fact, for seven years GSA has not provided the Council or Commission with any quarterly reports on the progress of the African Burial Ground that the law requires, and those agencies appear to have allowed this to happen. During 1992-93 those agencies had not been supportive of Howard University's comprehensive Research Design and what they called its "ethnocentric" approach to the study of the African Burial Ground. An extraordinary public and scientific review process, beyond the capabilities of those agencies, was required to demonstrate that our facilities and Research Design were actually superior to others the agencies had reviewed. They were compelled by public pressure to approve us on the basis of demonstrated ability. They have a very poor record for protecting African American sites and minimal outreach to the African American community. Their distinction from the attitudes of GSA is a "distinction without a difference." All public agencies need to be held accountable to the public, if agreements are going to be kept.

Finally, GSA wrote that the major components of the Project are led by African Americans. The fact is, that we

have been pushed aside by GSA's creation of a new position of Executive Director of the African Burial Ground to oversee us. Ms. Lisa Wager, who was appointed to that position, is a Euro-American who lacks the necessary expertise and understanding of the African American community. She has provided GSA leadership in terms of non-compliance with its public agreements. What GSA has done is equivalent to making an African American who is unknowledgeable about Jewish life and history the head of the Holocaust Museum and aiding that person's continuous interference with what the Jewish community wants that museum to do. Would that be allowed? I don't think so. The African American community is being duped, and neither the Advisory Council nor New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission is likely to change this situation on their own. Only the action or inaction of the African American community will be responsible for restoring or losing control of the African Burial Ground Project. Get involved. Organize. Write your Congressional Representatives. Write GSA. They are supposed to work for you. How do you want the story of the struggle for the dignity of the African Burial Ground to end?

Related Items:

□ On July 3, 1999, the Middle Passage Monument Project sponsored by the Homeward Bound Foundation (HBF) will honor the millions of Africans who died during the Middle Passage. A monument will be lowered onto the floor of the Atlantic Ocean and HBF organizer and founder, Wayne James, indicates that one of the chosen sites will be 427 kilometers off New York's harbor. This is yet another way of paying tribute to the 427 individuals excavated from the African Burial Ground. "The monument will serve as a grave marker for the world's largest, yet unmarked, graveyard," James explained. Between the years 2000 and 2006, he anticipates that six replicas of the monument will be placed in the six regions of the world where transatlantic trade occurred: Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, North America and South America."

The soon to be released "If The Ocean Had A Voice," is a song written and composed by Matthew Payne of Washington, D.C. for HBF's Project. Payne's lyrical song links the tragedy of the Middle Passage to contemporary urban crimes.

Prior to the July 3rd event, HBF will offer a number of celebratory events in New York City which include:

- June 23, 1999: Reception at the Brooklyn Museum of Art
- June 24, 1999: Reception aboard the Peking, a tall ship located at South Street Seaport Museum
- June 26, 1999: Farewell Event in New York's Harbor
- July 2, 1999: Ceremony At Sea Celebration in New York's Harbor

Visit HBF at www.middlepassage.org for more details



FRIENDS OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND
336 E.4TH St., NY, NY 10009

Tel: 212/477-5219 Fax:212/420-1890

Ayo Harrington

Friends of the African Burial Ground was established in the Fall of 1998 to address growing concerns with respect to the status of the African Burial Ground Project. Our membership includes members of the former Federal Steering Committee, current and former volunteers of the African Burial Ground Project, heads of education/community based groups, and others concerned with the Project's future.

In January we held our first Community Hearing on the Status of the African Burial Ground Project. In February, we met with City Council Speaker Peter Vallone and Helen Marshall, Co-Chair of the City Council Black and Latino Caucus, to ask that the City replace street signs leading to the site, contribute its share of funds for research/testing of the remains, and that the City stop the digging in City Hall Park. In the near future, the same request for research/testing will be made to the state legislature. On March 19, 1999 Friends held a vigil at the Duane Street site of the African Burial Ground.

On Saturday, April 17, 1999, Friends will hold a second Community Hearing at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, located at 135th St. and Malcolm X Blvd., in Manhattan at 1:00 P.M. The General Services Administration (GSA), the federal agency which has managerial responsibility for the African Burial Ground, has been asked to attend, report and respond to the community. Without explanation, they failed to attend our last public hearing. Other invited guests include: Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Scientific Project Director; Peggy King Jorde, Project Executive Director for Memorialization; Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, Director of the Office of Public Education & Interpretation; Howard Dodson, Former Chair of the Federal Steering Committee and current Chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; and representatives from the United Nations, the White House, NYC Landmarks, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C.

The following letter, originally sent to Congressman Charles Rangel, has been edited and updated for this publication. Among others, the original was forwarded to Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields,

City Council Speaker Peter Vallone, N.Y. State Black and Latino Caucus Chair-Assemblyman Keith Wright, City Council Caucus Co-Chair Helen Marshall and N.Y. State Senator David Paterson. It outlines our major concerns.



March 15, 1999

Dear Congressman Rangel:

Thank you for taking time to talk with me about Friends of the African Burial Ground and our concerns about General Services Administration's (GSA) violations of the African Burial Ground Project's (ABGP) 1989 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA); its 1991 Amendment; and related matters. As promised, an outline of the violations and concerns follow.

Reporting

The MOA specifies that GSA submit Quarterly Reports in June, September and December of each year to the signatories (NYC Landmarks Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation) that summarize actions taken by GSA to comply with the terms of the MOA and to allow for monitoring the progress of activities outlined in the MOA. Among other activities, this includes reports on Archaeology, Analysis and Reporting, Public Involvement, Reburial, Curation and Disposition, Site Interpretation and Research Design. GSA has not submitted Quarterly Reports since 1992 and, as a result, has violated the MOA on this matter alone numerous times.

We want GSA to provide Friends with written explanation as to why these reports were not done; a time line for when they will be done; the name of the employee whose job it was to do them; the action GSA will take against this employee for not doing said work for five years; and a copy of the reports. We want the MOA enforced.

Public Involvement

The MOA requires specific kinds of Public Involvement. It states that GSA must present its plan(s) for the analysis and reburial of the excavated remains and associated grave goods to groups, organizations, and institutions with an appropriate and direct interest or relationship in the human remains (Interested Parties) prior to GSA making a final decision on their plan(s). It goes on to specify that GSA provide a summary of all comments received and an explanation of how GSA has taken the comments into account in finalizing its proposed plan(s). Since 1994, GSA has held no public forum/effort through which to report or solicit descendant community and other public comment or involvement in the development of the ABGP.

We want a copy of the document that specifies GSA's plan for this required involvement and written explanation as to why they have not complied with the MOA on this matter for five years. *We want the MOA enforced.*

Scientific and Research Design

The Scientific and Research Design proposal, which defines the scope of work for this component of the ABGP, was approved by GSA and separately, in 1994, by the Federal Steering Committee pending demonstration of feasibility tests. The proposal included funding for research of dental and bone chemistry as well as male and female DNA research on 300 of the 427 skeletal remains at Howard University. Feasibility tests were performed and provided to GSA in 1997 and 1998. While GSA funded feasibility tests, they have refused to fund the actual research.

Instead, Howard University used University funds to do dental and bone chemistry tests and DNA research (female line only) on 32 of the skeletal remains. The research resulted in determining the countries of origin (Senegal, Niger, Nigeria and Benin) of the remains and their cultural groups within those countries. Further research (male line) would determine significant genetic properties such as sickle cell trait and the sex of those remains that were under twelve years of age upon death.

Complete research would provide a genetic pool through which African Americans could attempt an ancestral match. In light of the premeditated practice and laws established during slavery, through which this country successfully destroyed most connections to our ancestry, there is no question about the importance of this one time opportunity to African Americans and what the endeavor would signify worldwide.

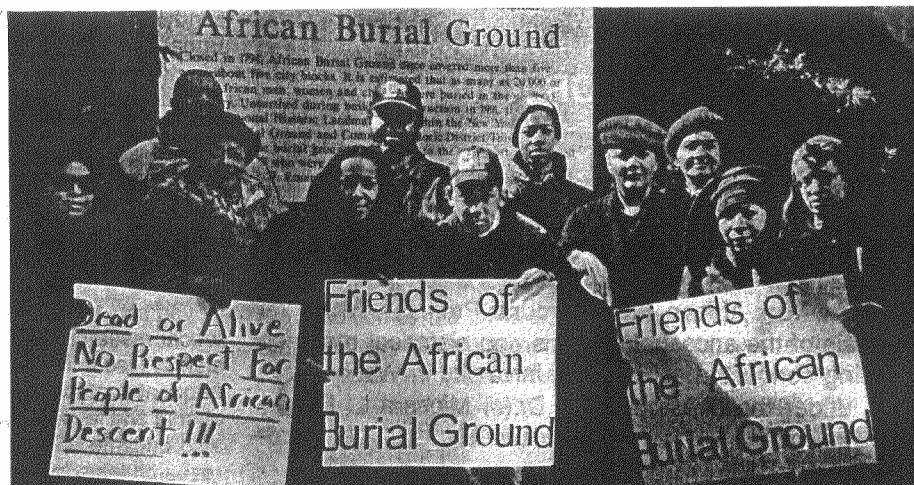


Photo credit: Laura Limuli

We want GSA to fund the agreed to research as specified in the Scientific and Design Proposal for 300 of the 427 remains at Howard University. *We want the MOA enforced.*

Additional Skeletal Remains

In 1993, additional ABG remains were unearthed on Chambers Street during a water main break. In 1998, additional remains were unearthed on Elk Street. In 1999, in City Hall Park which is undergoing a major renovation and which is part of the original cemetery, additional remains have been unearthed. The 1993 remains have been improperly stored, with no plan for research or reburial, in the old Tweed Court House for the past six years. The 1998 and 1999 remains have also been dumped in the old Tweed Court House. This pattern of disrespect and neglect of our ancestors' remains is unacceptable.

We want the digging in City Hall to stop. We want Congressional and City Council Hearings held on the manner in which digging has occurred in Landmark areas; including those of the African Burial Ground. We want the descendant and broader community to consider that all remains/artifacts found in any section of the African Burial Ground be placed under the authority of the MOA. *We want the MOA enforced.*

Memorialization

GSA's rescheduling and constant delays have placed the Memorialization component in jeopardy. Memorialization funding ends on April 1, 1999. The contract for the component head ends in October of 1999. Ironically, GSA's current time line for Memorialization completion is the year 2001 for the Interpretive Center (interior) and 2002 for the Memorial Art Work (exterior) or, in other words, two to three years after funding for the work and component head's position is scheduled to end.

As GSA's new timeline for completion of this component of the ABGP is the year 2002, the component head's contract must be renewed through that time. As work is now behind schedule and to ensure capability for getting the scope of work completed, the position must be immediately refunded as a full time one to match the extended time line.

Disrespect for the Descendant and Broader Community.

GSA was asked to report to the descendant and broader public at a Community Hearing, sponsored by Friends of the African Burial Ground, on January 23, 1999. Not one of the four GSA employees asked to (Lisa Wager, Robert Martin, Thurman Davis or David Barrum) attended. The last three

(Continued on page 12)

Who's Who in the African Burial Ground Project: OPEI'S DIRECTOR AND STAFF

The Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground Project (OPEI) officially opened in May 1993. Our mission is to provide information on the research findings of a constantly evolving New York African Burial Ground Project. While the analysis of the ancestral remains and historical research is being conducted at Howard University in Washington, D.C. under the directorship of Dr.(s) Michael L. Blakey and Edna Greene Medford, respectively, the OPEI provides information to the public-at-large and the New York descendant and global communities.

The OPEI fulfills its mission by conducting quarterly educators symposia, publishing *Update*: the quarterly newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, conducting African Burial Ground historic site tours, and slide presentations at the World Trade Center office, as well as at off site locations. We also publish a variety of educational publications and operate a reading room for students, scholars and others conducting research on the African presence in colonial and early New York. Since our opening, we have provided information to more than 91,000 individuals and organizations locally, nationally and internationally. To help us "spread the word" about this landmark Project, we have trained nearly 200 volunteers, and more than one dozen college and high school students.



Sherrill D. Wilson, Director of OPEI, is an urban anthropologist and the Project Ethnohistorian with a research focus on Africans in colonial and early New York City. She received her Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research in New York City in 1991. She also holds an undergraduate degree in Religious Studies from Hunter College awarded in 1979. Dr. Wilson is the author of *New*

York City's African Slaveowners: A Social and Material Culture History (1994), and the publisher of *Through Black Eyes*. She is also the co-author of *How to Get Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Education*. She has given lectures and workshops locally and nationally on the New York African presence, Slavery in the North, and African American Genealogy. Dr. Wilson appears in the following documentary films depicting the New York African Burial Ground: *Unearthing the Slave Trade*, *Feel It In My Bones*, *The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery*, *Then I'll Be Free To Travel Home* and *Slavery's Buried Past*. She is currently serving as a national scholar for Girls, Inc.'s NEH funded pilot program Girls Dig It. In January of 1999 Dr. Wilson received recognition as a New York City Centennial Historian by the Mayor's Office of the City of New York.

OPEI STAFF (alphabetical listing)

Emilyn Brown's association with the African Burial Ground began in 1991 as a community activist seeking to preserve the site, and as a volunteer for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. She helped to organize *Ground Truth*, a newsletter covering issues related to the site and served as its co-editor. In 1992 she met the late Noel Pointer Sr. and joined his petition drive, gathering more than 40,000 signatures in support of the site. She was hired as a **Public Educator** by OPEI in November, 1992. Her work tasks include historical research, public presentations, and training interns and staff in research methods. As Senior Editor of *Update*, she is a frequent contributor to the newsletter and is responsible for the design and layout of it and many other OPEI publications. She also became a historical researcher for the Howard University research team in June of 1998. Emilyn is a CUNY B.A. graduate who majored in Africana studies and anthropology. Her scholastic awards include the Zora Neale Hurston Award for an essay on cemeteries, and an Aaron Diamond Fellowship. She has written for the *New York City Encyclopedia* (1994), *The Daily Challenge*, *The New York Beacon* and for New York City's Municipal Archives.



Donna Harden Cole is a **Public Educator** and was in the first class of Public Educators trained by Director Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson. She has held this position since January, 1993. Donna received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Biology/ Psychology with a minor in history in 1981 from Bernard M. Baruch College. She has done graduate work in Human Resources Management at the New School for Social Research, and at the City College of New York in American History. As a Public Educator, Donna has conducted lectures and tours about the landmark site and is also co-coordinator for OPEI's volunteer program. She is a regular contributor to OPEI's newsletter, *Update*. In 1997, she co-authored an article with Deborah Wright entitled "Volunteerism: The Cornerstone of the African Burial Ground," which was also published in the *New York Daily Challenge*. The article was also presented at the American Anthropology Association Conference. Her article entitled "A Taste From The Past," has been published in OPEI's Classroom Study Guide, and presented at an OPEI Educator's Symposium in 1997. Donna is married to OPEI volunteer Allen Cole, Sr. and they have two children, Alonna and Allen, Jr.



Marie-Alice Devieux has been a **Public Educator** for the OPEI since 1994. A former editor and contributor to the Project's newsletter *Update*, she has written articles on the site's associated visual art, oral history, anthropology and meaning, and for the Children's Corner. Assisting national supporters, she has coordinated efforts to commemorate the African Burial Ground ancestors on a stamp series. She has trained staff in conducting Foley Square Laboratory tours and is collaborating on the design of the project's WEB site. A graduate student in anthropology, Marie-Alice's research interests have centered on symbolic anthropology and ethnomusicology. She has conducted fieldwork on women and food in Harare, Zimbabwe, oral history research with some members of the African Burial Ground descendant community, urban Native American music performance, and genealogy and fiction research at the Somerset Plantation in North Carolina. The daughter of politically active Haitian immigrants, Evy and Marcel, Marie-Alice (pronounced Mah'ree - Ah'leece) is also the recipient of several awards in the social sciences and humanities.



OPEI STAFF CONTINUED



Karen Gayle began as a volunteer at the African Burial Ground Project in December of 1998. As a result of her ambition, motivation, hard work and perseverance, she was hired as a part-time, **office support staff member**. Karen's future goals include pursuing her GED in the summer of '99 and entering college by the year 2000. Karen has strong interests in African

history, music, poetry and art.



Deinabo George joined the African Burial Ground Project in November 1995 as a **Public Educator**. He has presented the history of the enslaved Africans in colonial New York City to public school children, college students of all ages, churches, group homes, community organizations, and prisons. Other office duties include

working on the office mailing list and assembling packages of information for the public. Deinabo is also a computer consultant. He builds computers, troubleshoots hardware and software problems, and upgrades components. It is Deinabo's hope that this archaeological discovery will begin a revision of New York City's history. He feels it's important for not just the City, but the world to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of African Americans and Africans throughout the diaspora.



Shanequa Henry is a Spring '99 high school intern who has been with the African Burial Ground Project since February, 1999. She is a senior at City-As-School who will graduate in June of 1999. Prior to working for the Project, she was an active volunteer at Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell's office in Harlem and also at Lenox Hill Hospital. Shanequa is a participant in Columbia University's College

Bound Program and takes courses at the New School in lower Manhattan. Her goals are to go away to college and to study law. In her spare time, she enjoys reading novels, braiding hair and watching movies.



Tamara Jubilee-Shaw has been working as a **public educator** for OPEI since December, 1995. Her husband Kahlil Shaw is one of OPEI's many active volunteers. Tamara holds an undergraduate degree in Journalism from Delaware State University (DSU) in Dover, Delaware. During the time she was at DSU she had the opportunity to produce a television news show and served as editor-in-chief for the student newspaper, *The Hornet*. In 1997, Tamara obtained her Master's Degree in Media Studies with

a cultural emphasis at the New School for Social Research. At OPEI, her various duties include research assignments when needed, and the upkeep of archival files for students, researchers and educators. She has researched and completed a chronological study of diseases and ailments prevalent in early New York City. Tamara has also been able to bring her extensive visual arts experience to the Project by producing many of the images used in the photo essays, articles and stories in *Update*.



Allison Manfra, a Long Islander, is a senior at Hunter College, studying anthropology and archaeology. She became involved with the OPEI as an intern in February of 1998. In addition to clerical assistance, Allison offered assistance to both Public Educators and lab technicians in the Foley Square archaeology laboratory. A **support staff member** since June of 1998, she is a fairly

new addition to the OPEI staff. Her contributions to the OPEI remain similar to her internship requirements, as she divides her time between working for the African Burial Ground Project and attending academic classes. Allison also photographs historical material for OPEI slide use, and contributes to the *Update*: the Newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project. Upon receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in June of 1999, Allison hopes to continue her academic pursuits in the fields of anthropology and historical archaeology.



"Northern born but Southern raised," **Chadra Dalan Pittman**, was reared in the Northeast Bronx. She and her older sister, Carlane, were born to Cecelia and Carlton Pittman. Chadra was drawn to the Project in 1991 while studying anthropology at George Mason University. An avid activist, Chadra co-founded a theatrical group, conducted racism workshops and founded empowerment groups for women. Upon receiving her B.A. in Anthropology and minor in African American studies in May 1995, Chadra relocated to New York and began working for the Project in November 1995.

At the OPEI, Chadra works as a **Public Educator** and is the Media coordinator for OPEI. She has been a contributor to the *Update* and *Cornerstone* newsletters. In the Summer of 1998, Chadra assisted Dr. Lee Baker, an anthropologist at Columbia University, with a course on the ABG, and in October, 1998, Chadra's first published work "If Bones Could Speak," was published in *Transforming Anthropology*. Chadra plans to continue her anthropological career with an emphasis on Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology.



Leona Shuler was introduced to the African Burial Ground project through her church, The Mariner's Temple. She became an OPEI volunteer in 1993, distributing information on the Project, collecting signatures for a commemorative stamp, and assisting at OPEI events. She wrote about her memorable trip to West Africa in OPEI's volunteer newsletter, *The Cornerstone*. Leona is very active in her community. She has worked on

projects such as feeding the homeless, registering people for NY Cares Volunteer Day, monitors exams for New York City, serves as an inspector for the Board of Election and tutors grade school children from a shelter home. She also develops and trains individuals to run a specialized business. Leona Shuler received her B.A. in Business Information Systems from PACE University. After retiring from a private real estate corporation with 20 years of service, she became **Field Office Administrator** for the OPEI in 1997. Leona is very proud of her son and daughter whom she has nurtured and raised as a single parent.

Who's Who in OPEI (continued)



Tyrene Wright, is a temporary office support staff member who received her B.S. in History at Tuskegee University. She is currently pursuing her MA/ Ph.D. in History at the City University of New York. Tyrene maintained the media files and bibliographic citations for research. Tyrene is also Acting Director of Education/ Interpreter at St. Paul's National Historic Site in Mount Vernon, New York where she teaches 4th graders Revolutionary War and local history. She has performed ground breaking research at St. Paul's, discovering an enslaved African who served as a Revolutionary War Soldier. Tyrene's research is included in "Tuskegee's Feminine Force" by Dr. Linda Lane, and she has served as a presenter of Tuskegee University Lynching Files. She plans to obtain her Ph.D. in History, while writing, researching, and lecturing throughout the world on issues related to African peoples presence/contributions. Her goal is to retell African Peoples History from an African, Pan-Africanist perspective.

OPEI Calendar of Saturday Events

- | | |
|---|---|
| ◆ Sat., Apr. 24, 1999
Volunteer Training
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. | ◆ Sat., Sept. 18, 1999
African Burial Ground Film Festival
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. |
| ◆ Sat., May 22, 1999
Open House
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. | ◆ Sat., Oct. 16, 1999
Volunteer Training
12:00-5:00 p.m. |
| ◆ Sat., Jun. 19, 1999
OPEI Open to the Public
12:00-4:00 p.m. | ◆ Sat., Nov. 20, 1999
Fall Educators Symposium
11:00-5:00 p.m. |
| ◆ Sat., July 24, 1999
Summer Educators Symposium
11:00-5:00 p.m. | ◆ Sat., Dec. 18, 1999
Kwanzaa Film Festival
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. |
| ◆ Sat., Aug. 21, 1999
OPEI Open to the Public
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. | |

For information and reservations call (212) 432-5707

ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST ?

Please submit your name and/or corrections to: OPEI, 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239, New York, New York 10048 (212) 432-5707

Friends of the African Burial Ground (continued from page 9)

have never responded to our numerous telephone calls and faxes. Only the day before the Hearing were we informed that no one from GSA would attend. That same day we were faxed a letter that did not address our request for GSA to attend, the reason they would not, or the concerns Friends had raised. *In fact, in the two months since the Hearing, subsequent requests to GSA to confirm a date for which they would be available for a Community Hearing remain unanswered.*

Friends of the African Burial Ground will hold another Community Hearing on Saturday, April 17th and request through you, that GSA attend, report and respond to community concerns and recommendations regarding the ABGP.

The title of Executive Director of the African Burial Group Project was specifically created for a GSA, non-African American employee. While it is understood that a GSA employee must bear managerial responsibility for a GSA project, consciously creating a particular title for a non-African American reveals GSA's contempt, disrespect and unbelievable insensitivity to the spirit of the African Burial Ground. **It is significantly symbolic of GSA's arrogant, dismissive treatment of the descendant community. We want the title eliminated immediately.**

Conclusion

Congressman Rangel, as you can see, growing alarm for the African Burial Ground and related matters exist for good reason. The MOA was meant to ensure the ongoing involvement of the descendant and broader community and to eliminate potential abuse of the African Burial Ground Project. GSA has excluded the descendant and broader community and has continually reinterpreted ABGP procedure and work scope. There is no question that GSA has brazenly and without expression of regret or apology violated the MOA and public trust.

We ask for your help in enforcing the MOA including work scope and procedure; support for our recommendations; and your presence at our April 17th Community Hearing. Clearly, current events dictate the need for re-establishment of a formal, community based oversight committee for the ABGP for which we petition your help in setting up. We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss how we might quickly proceed and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,
Ayo Harrington, Chair



GSA ANNOUNCES FINALISTS FOR AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Renee Miscione

The African Burial Ground Interpretive Center, telling about the lives of 18th Century African Americans buried in Lower Manhattan, moved a step closer to reality with the March 15, 1999 announcement of five finalist teams who will compete to design and build it. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is planning the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center as one of the focal points in its \$15 million effort in 1991 to honor the memory of colonial-era burials uncovered during a construction project in 1991. An Exterior Memorial is also planned for the National Historic Landmark site.

"We have an exciting opportunity to build a great Interpretive Center and tell the story of early African Americans in New York City," GSA Regional Administrator Thomas J. Ryan said in announcing the finalists. "It is a unique activity for us to be working on a project of such great historical significance, and this represents a major step forward towards construction."

The five finalist teams, in alphabetical order, are:

- ◆ **Design & Production Inc. of Lorton, VA.,** key personnel: Michael Smith, Patrick Gallagher, Roberta Washington, Daniel Sorg, James Oliver Horton and Theresa Singleton
- ◆ **Duckett and Associates/H.J. Russell & Company of Atlanta, GA.,** key personnel: Bruce Harris, Craig VanDevere, Darrell Stallings, Herman Mason, Jr., Lee Baker and Warren Barbour.
- ◆ **IDI Construction Company, Inc. of New York, N.Y.,** key personnel: Jose Velazquez, Jacqueline Hamilton, Deidre Scott, Robert Avitable, A.J. Williams-Myers and Lee Baker.
- ◆ **Promatech, Inc. of New York, N.Y.,** key personnel: William E. Davis, Jr., John K. Samuels III, Martial Elie-Pierre, Thomas Bouchard, Delores Newton, and Gayle T. Tate.

◆ **StudioWorks UAI, a Joint Venture New York, N.Y.,** key personnel: Tony Shitemi, Winston Deans, Keith Godard, Lee Baker and Margaret Washington.

Since the announcement of the finalists, Duckett and Associates/H.J. Russell & Company have withdrawn their proposal, but the four remaining finalists will continue to compete for the contract to design and build the Interpretive Center.

GSA's extensive outreach effort crossed national and international borders and the agency received a wide variety of submissions in response to its request for proposals. GSA anticipates awarding a contract for the Interpretive Center in 2000, with the opening of the Center anticipated in 2001. A separate procurement for the Exterior Memorial is being conducted and GSA anticipates announcing the finalists for the Project by the Fall of 1999, with an award of the commission by the Fall of 2000.

GSA held two public forums on April 8th to afford the finalist teams the opportunity to hear the views of the descendant community and interested parties on what should be included in the Interpretive Center. Public input is an important part of the Interpretive Center procurement, and GSA held both an afternoon and evening forum to allow maximum opportunity for attendance.

Written comments will also be accepted by GSA, either as letters or as responses to the Interpretive Center Public Survey. The Survey has been widely disseminated since May 1998 and is available by calling (212) 264-6949, or on the Internet at <http://R2.gsa.gov/> (click on "Special Interest.") A transcript of the forums and all written comments will be provided to the finalist teams and advisors. Any written comments should be sent no later than April 30, 1999 to:

African Burial Ground Memorialization
U.S. General Services Administration
26 Federal Plaza, Room 1607
New York, NY 10278



GSA selected the Interpretive Center finalists, who will now proceed to the next phase of the competition, with the assistance of seven distinguished scientific, educational, and exhibit design experts who made individual recommendations to the agency.

The experts are **Dr. Michael L. Blakey**, of the Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology at Howard University in Washington, D.C.; Dr. Howard Dodson, Chair, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City; Dr. Rex Marshall Ellis, Chair, Division of Cultural History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; Dr. T.J. Davis of the History Department at Arizona State University; Sylvia Harris, exhibit designer of Yale University; Dr. Fath Davis Ruffins of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin of the Graduate Program in History Museum Studies at SUNY Cooperstown. These experts will continue their involvement throughout the Project of the opening of the Interpretive Center in 2001.

GSA's \$15 million African Burial Ground Project has three primary components: Scientific research being conducted at Howard University; Public Education and Interpretation; and Memorialization. The African Burial Ground Interpretive Center and the Exterior Memorial in New York City are part of the agency's memorialization of this National Historic Landmark. GSA has also commissioned six works of art, all referencing the African Burial Ground, for the Federal Office Building at 290 Broadway, adjacent to the African Burial Ground National Historic Site.

The 2,000 square foot Interpretive Center will be located within the Federal Office Building at 290 Broadway. The remains of approximately 400 people were removed from the African Burial Ground National Historic site located at the corner of Duane and Elk Streets in Lower Manhattan, and these human remains are currently being studied at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Once these studies are concluded, and the Exterior Memorial has been installed on the site, the remains will be returned to their final resting place and reinterred at the African Burial Ground with an appropriate ceremony.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF UPDATE:

- ▼ **Voices of Old New York**
- ▼ **Winning Stories and Poems from the African Burial Ground Writing Competition**

Exploring New York's African Past
(cont. from page 1)

workshops were planned and conducted by OPEI Public Education staffers Emilyn Brown, Marie-Alice Devieux, Chadra D. Pittman, support staffer Allison Manfra, and intern Shanequa Henry.

The day's activities concluded with an informative panel of distinguished scholars whose presentations focused on "New York's African American Past." The panel was moderated by Dr. Lee Baker, of Columbia University. Panelists included: Mark Mack, Laboratory Director at Howard University who provided an update on the analysis of the African Burial Ground's ancestral remains; Cynthia Copeland, Curator and Educator from the New York Historical Society who gave a presentation on New York's Seneca Village community; Dr. Craig Wilder of Williams College provided a lecture on Brooklyn's African history, and Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson provided an overview of the African presence in early and colonial New York.



**THE AFRICAN BURIAL
GROUND PROJECT**

PRESENTS ITS

**7TH ANNUAL
OPEN HOUSE**

**Sat., May 22, 1999
12:00 noon -5:00 p.m.**

**Updates on the Project,
site tours, documen-
taries and educational
materials will be offered.**

This event is free and open to the public. For reservations call (212) 432-5707 or send e-mail to:

nyabg@world.att.net

PETITION FOR AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND COMMEMORATIVE STAMP SERIES STATUS

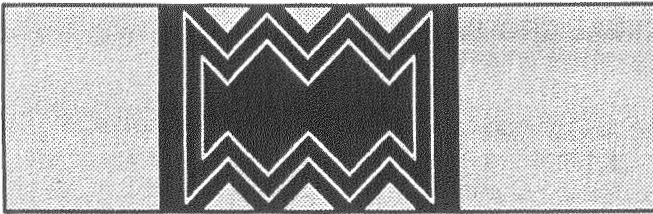
We, the undersigned parties, who are committed to the recognition and preservation of the heritage of Africans and their descendants in the Americas, request that the African Burial Ground in the National Historic District of New York be recommended for the Commemorative Stamp Series status and approval by the Postmaster General.

There is no age requirement to sign the petition

[illegible]

Return to: Office of Public Education and Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground
6 World Trade Center
U.S. Custom House, Rm 239
New York, NY 10048
Tel. (212) 432-5707 Fax (212) 432-5920

**Please return as soon as possible.
All petitions must be returned by May 31, 1999**



Office of Public Education and Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground
U.S. Custom House
6 World Trade Center, Rm. 239
New York, N.Y. 10048

ADDRESS

